



By Paul Jarvis

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Write & Sell Your Damn Book

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lesson one

The why & why not



So, you want to write a book, eh? Hold on there tiger. Let's back up a little.

The most important part of writing a book (after the actual writing part, obviously) is being honest with yourself about why you want to write it. So let's start there.

Treat your book as if you're the founder of a new startup. You're in charge and you make the rules/calls. But unless you put in some real fucking hard work, nothing is ever going to launch or ship. The best way to stay motivated to do said work is by figuring out why you're doing it in the first place.

Why do you want to write a damn book? What is your motivation for writing it?

Good answers: to tell your story, share something you know to be true, explain a unique perspective, teach people the knowledge/expertise you've spent years accumulating.

Shitty answers: fortune, fame, to become a media whore, to impress your mom.

Why haven't you written your book already? Make a list. Use this list as a starting point.

- What's preventing you from starting?
- Why are you procrastinating?
- What are you scared of?
- What's distracting you?

It's not new agey to be self-reflective and honest, and you don't need to share your answers with anyone else.

ACTION

Make a list of your reasons for writing your book, as well as why you haven't written it yet.

Do your motivations line up with what brings meaning to your life and work?

Are any of your reasons for not writing it yet actually valid, or are they fear- and procrastination-based?

lesson two

Fuck rules & fuck worrying



There are no rules for independently publishing and selling books. They're gone. This course can't even tell you, "follow what I say or else you'll fail, sucker!" Do whatever feels right and aligns with your initial motivations. Try to detach yourself from the outcome and focus on the task at hand: writing your damn book.

Forget about:

- **Book length.** There's no word minimum or maximum. 10,000 words, 150,000 words – whatever works for what you need to say. Padding your book to hit a certain word total does your readers a huge disservice.
- **Writing tools.** Use what works, period. Word, Pages, iA Writer, a pen and paper, or a rusty old typewriter. Your own blood isn't recommended, unless your book is very short.
- **A foreword written by someone famous.** You don't need an endorsement from Seth Godin (although I'm sure it would help).
- **Acceptance from the publishing industry.** Most publishers don't fully understand self-publishing and aren't in the position to experiment as much as you can. Move forward without their approval. Give yourself permission to write your book without a traditional publishing contract.

Stop worrying about the steps you haven't reached yet. In fact, that's why this course has delayed content; I'm hoping the content trickle will encourage you to really focus on applying the concepts from each lesson (which includes taking the action steps), instead of skimming over everything quickly and half-assing it all.

Every minute you spend thinking about what can't happen until you've written your book is a minute that you could have spent writing.

These thoughts will fuck you up:

- Who will buy my damn book?
- How will I promote/market my book?
- What platform should I sell it on, and what format should I use?
- Where/how should I print it?
- How should it be priced?
- What should the cover look like?
- What fonts or colours should I use?
- What if everyone hates it and goes on to attack my family and pets online – and then I retaliate and end up in prison (but at least then you'll have time to write, right?)?
- Zombie apocalypse!! (Unless your book is about a zombie apocalypse, then by all means, think about this a lot.)

ACTION

Make a list of all the obstacles in your way – both now and later.

Challenge every single one of them based on your initial motivations, because if you want to write a book, you can.

Cross out (in a thick marker) each obstacle you've successfully challenged. You don't need permission from anyone but your awesome self.

lesson three

Be an idea factory



Once you know you want to write a book and have a general idea of the topic, start brainstorming immediately.

Think about:

- What chapters should it have?
- What topics/points should it include?
- What would your ideal reader want the book to cover?
- How should your book be framed? Using case studies? Personal stories?
- What's the right tone? Funny? Authoritative? Snarky?
- What's the main idea that readers should take away from your book?

Don't rule out any ideas at first. Write every single one down, without judgment. It's difficult to be creative if you edit your brainstorming sessions, so keep them open and flowing, even if the ideas seem silly or dumb right now.

ACTION

Write out every single idea you have for your book without editing, critiquing or judging.

Don't stop writing until you're completely out of ideas (or until you feel you have enough to actually write a whole book).

Become an idea factory.

lesson four

Build your audience



The only thing you should do (other than actually writing your damn book) is to build your audience before you release it. By audience, I mean your mailing list.

Fuck social media as a primary promotion tool – it’s too vapid and ephemeral to make much of a difference. All it can do is amplify. Think of it this way – do you read every email in your inbox? Probably. Do you scroll back through your social media feeds to make sure you read *every single* tweet/update/whatever? Probably not.

Once you’ve solidified your ideas and theme, build a “Coming Soon” page that lists a bit about your book and includes a signup form at the bottom. If you want to sweeten the pot, offer your subscribers early access, a purchase discount or bonus materials.

There’s no easy way to sell your book unless you’ve built your own small army to buy and promote it. This can’t wait until your book is out. No one is going to drive people to buy your damn book except for you. So build your list now (and we’ll get into non-asshat-style promotion in a later lesson).

Direct people to your “Coming Soon” page by:

- Posting on social media (in updates and as your main profile URL). Social media *is* good for driving people to a mailing list, at least initially.
- Adding the URL into your email signature.
- Talking about it in the online groups/message boards you visit.
- Adding a link in the bio you use for guest posts or outside content you write.
- Putting the URL at the bottom of every blog post you write on your own site.

What to send the people who subscribe before your book is released:

- Poll/survey questions about what they'd like to see answered or included in your book. Don't crowd-source the book, but do take the pulse of your audience and the general direction of their interests.
- Ask subscribers to be examples/case studies in your book (involving them).
- Share excerpts from your book to tease them with content. • Give them a behind-the-scenes view of your process (photos are great for this).
- Have a typo-hunt contest with prizes (more on this in a later lesson).

ACTION

Build your “Coming Soon” page right now and attach it to a mailing list.

Then, immediately get back to writing.

lesson five

Write (horribly)



Your first draft will suck.

So don't worry about spelling, sentence structure, or even the finer points of the English language. Be at peace with a horrible first draft and give yourself permission to write it badly.

Become a fucking fire hose of words with two settings: **WRITING** everything that comes to your mind about your topic and **THINKING** about writing (keep a notepad with you at all times, even beside your bed or hang a waterproof board in the shower).

Write down everything that could even be remotely included in your book. Worry about editing later. Worry about it sounding awesome and smart later. Worry about it making perfect sense later. Worry about the *Chicago Manual of Style's* syntax recommendations later. Worry about the title of the book later.

Ideas to help you write more frequently:

- **Set aside time every day to go entirely offline and write.** Social media and email create distractions you don't need. Start with 30 minutes a day and build up from there.
- If it helps, **give yourself a number of words you want to hit each day.** Say, 500. When you hit that, stop writing (even if you're inspired). That'll help you stay pumped to keep writing the next day. If reaching a word limit is scary, give yourself a time limit instead, and just put your ass in a chair with no distractions.
- **Be present.** If you start thinking about making your writing great or selling lots of copies, tell your brain to screw off. Any time spent *not* thinking about what you're currently writing is time you've just wasted.

- **Don't wait to be “inspired.”** That's for hippies or leprechauns. Just write, and if you're stuck, refer to your idea factory for what to write about. Neither hippies nor leprechauns have ever held a job in an idea factory.
- **Write out of order if you need to.** Piece it together later.
- **Only stop writing your first draft when you've written about every idea from your factory.**

Writing is not about magical elves, dancing in your brain, showing you how writing is done. It's about sitting down, tuning everything else out, and actually writing – badly at first, then making small adjustments until it's not bad anymore.

ACTION

Write your horrible first draft.

lesson six

Iterations & feedback



Clarity and bravery can come in small iterations. Revise or even rewrite your first draft completely. Then, do it again. Keep revising and rewriting until it feels clear and strong enough for someone else to read.

There's a fine line between iteration and obsession. Iteration is helpful to make your book better. Obsession is going overboard or focusing on your book being "perfect." It will never be flawless, but it should be true to your voice and honest about what you have to say—not to mention free of grammar and spelling mistakes.

If you're just starting or you're unsure about what you've written, invite a handful of people to read a polished(ish) draft. Tell them not to worry about grammar or spelling issues. You're just looking for general insights. Make sure they're the sorts of people you want to read the book, as in, your mom is a wonderful woman, but she might not be the target audience. Her opinion shouldn't matter as much.

What to ask initial readers:

- Does it make sense?
- Does it flow in a logical way?
- Does it leave anything unanswered?
- Does the title adequately reflect the content?
- Does anything feel strange / dishonest / unclear?
- Is this something they'd want to share with others?

You don't have to act on what they say, but do notice if feedback patterns emerge (i.e. every single person makes the same comment). Then, it might be wise to update or change your draft accordingly.

ACTION

Start looking critically at your book after you've written a solid first draft.

Make revisions, edits and fixes until it feels clear and honest.

Then, solicit feedback from people you trust.

lesson seven

Hire a fucking editor



You can create a book, start to finish, for almost no money. The only thing worth paying for (if you're on a budget) is a good editor. If you can't afford a *good* editor, *any* editor is better than *no* editor.

Your editor will improve the book by:

- Being the voice of reason. They'll let you know if your tone doesn't feel authentic or you're talking out of your ass.
- Fixing your spelling, grammar and sentence structure issues.
- Telling you where you need to add more content and where you need to remove extra stuff.
- Assisting with the structure and flow of your book.

Good editors can cost thousands. Editors who will simply do the job will cost significantly less. Figure out your budget (pre-sell copies of your book if you have to come up with the funds), but hire a fucking editor. If you don't know any editors or can't find one, ask friends or other published authors for referrals. Or even [ask me](#).

Editing your book will take longer than you think, even if you've hired the best editor in the world. It can even take as long as it took to actually write your book.

Once you've finished the editing process, ask a handful of people to proofread your damn book. If your budget allows, offer CASH MONEY for every typo they can find (even if it's \$10/typo). Otherwise, ask family or friends to proofread it for free. Call in favours if necessary. Even the best editor is only human (until they invent Edit-o-TRON2000) and WILL miss a few minor typos or mistakes.

ACTION

You guessed it: hire a fucking editor!

And don't be defensive. Good editors make changes and offer criticism because they want you (and your book) to succeed.

lesson eight

Platform & distribution



While your editor is busy editing, figure out *how and where* you'll sell your book. Read this article on the differences between [Amazon & Indie E-commerce Platforms](#).

[Gumroad](#) is by far the best indie e-commerce platform. If you go with Amazon (exclusively), you'll need to format your book for [Kindle](#).

If you're selling your book on an indie platform, use any format that makes sense. If your book is heavily designed, sell it as a PDF. If it's primarily text-based, sell it as a PDF + MOBI + EPUB to cover all your bases.

If you want to sell the book on your own site AND Amazon, iTunes, NOOK, etc., use a distribution partner like BookBaby, SmashWords or Book Tango. They take care of the nerdy bits and heavy lifting, so all you have to do is provide the finished book file.

All this tech-speak can be intimidating. If you're feeling overwhelmed, here are two things to keep in mind:

1. There are a shit-ton (technical term) of free resources available to walk you through all these steps. I've listed a few here, but a quick Google search will reveal dozens of others that can help.
2. This is part of the path to becoming a (self-) published author. You have to decide if you really want it, and if so, accept that you'll have to figure out some technical details. Trust me, it's not rocket science. Hundreds of thousands of people have done it, and if you really want to see your book out in the world, so will you. And, you can always hire nerds to help with any technical bits that really feel baffling.

ACTION

Decide how and where your book will be sold. You can't choose a 'wrong' platform.

What matters most is that you write an awesome fucking book.

lesson nine

Design



Your book needs design work, especially for the cover.

If you have no aesthetic taste and no money, you'll have to design it yourself. In this case, less is more for the cover: choose a solid colour background or professional photo, plus (minimal) clear and bold text. That's it. No clipart. No bathroom mirror selfies. No learning Photoshop. No embellishments. If you aren't a professional designer, you'll make the wrong choices. Go simple.

For the inside, make sure there's enough padding around the edges, that the line-height makes the text easy to read and that your font choice won't give anyone a headache. Stick to one font (two max) and one colour (two max).

If you can afford a designer, hire one who has book covers that you like in their portfolio. You can pay anywhere from \$5 (on [fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com)) to over \$5,000 for book design.

When looking for a book designer, be upfront about your budget and timeline, which will make it easier (and faster) to see if there's a good fit.

If you're releasing your book as a PDF, have the inside designed as well. Otherwise, follow the formatting guidelines for Amazon, since MOBI and EPUB strip out most formatting and design anyway.

Make sure the cover looks good as a thumbnail, since that's how it'll be viewed on Amazon or even on your own website. Can you still read the title if it's small? Good.

ACTION

Hire a designer or do a (simple!) design yourself.

lesson ten

Pricing



There's no magic formula for pricing your damn book. Independently published books can be anything from free to ONE MILLION DOLLARS (this probably hasn't happened yet, but it could).

Here's a simple way to think about it: based on your original motivations, how important is making money?

If you price cheap (free to a couple bucks), your book might sell more copies. If you price it high (\$20+), your book can seem either valuable/high quality OR like you're a greedy, clueless asshat. It can go either way.

The smaller your audience or established track record, the less you might potentially charge for your book. You can always price it cheaper (or even free) to build your audience, mailing list or brand.

It comes down to what feels fair and right to you. Just be warned, your price also has to line up with what feels fair and right to your desired audience.

You can always start out low and increase the price if your book gains traction. Or offer deals and discounts if it's not selling well at its current price.

ACTION

Figure out the price of your book and move forward with it, knowing that you shouldn't hold onto that price too tightly. Be ready to adjust as necessary, as often as necessary.

lesson eleven

Sales page



Regardless of your chosen platform or distribution method, you also need to promote the book on your own site, which means making a sales page. Although most people go for the “more-is-more” approach with sales pages, making them an endless-fucking-scroll-session, it’s not a requirement. You might have guessed (correctly) that I hate those scroll pages.

Remember the rules? There are none. Do what works and feels right.

What’s important on your sales page:

- **Your book’s title.** No shit, right?
- **A brief and CLEAR synopsis of your book** and what it’s about. Save the flowery language for your next poetry slam, you hippie.
- **How and where to buy it** and for what price.
- **The cover design.** If it’s a digital book, for fuck’s sake do NOT put the cover on a drawing of a real book! That’s a mixed design metaphor.
- **A few testimonials.** Show that someone, somewhere has read it and liked it. These don’t have to be from huge (or even recognizable) names. Get these before your book launches by sending out advance copies.
- **A great fucking author bio.** Tell readers who you are, why you wrote your damn book and why someone should listen to what you have to say about the topic.

Optional / maybe have on your sales page:

- **An excerpt from your book**, to whet people's whistles. A downloadable PDF will work.
- **A short audio clip** of you reading the introduction ([example](#)).
- **A video trailer**. It could be you talking about the content or your pet peeing on the book cover. Be creative!
- **How readers can connect with you**. Mailing list, social media links, etc.
- **A table of contents**.
- **Downloadables for media types**. A high-res book cover and high-res author photo will cover your bases.

The key is to not go overboard. Most people have almost no attention span, so get to the point quickly. Tell them what your book is about, how they can buy it, what others have said about it, and who the hell you are. The page doesn't have to be fancy or full of design bells and whistles.

Some good sales pages:

<http://37signals.com/remote/>

<http://pjrvs.com/everything/>

<http://www.theminimalists.com/etr/>

<http://nathanbarry.com/app-design-handbook/>

ACTION

Write your damn sales page. Keep it simple and clear!

lesson twelve

Launch



Once your book is edited, you've chosen how you're selling it, how much it costs, and the sales page is ready... holy shit, it's almost time to LAUNCH. This is the most fun and vomit-inducingly scary part.

Prior to launch:

- Tease your mailing list (social media, too – although this is less important) with excerpts. Get them excited.
- Send advance copies to people for testimonials and reviews.
- Use any and all connections to reach publications or websites that might review your book. Note: most will not (that's just how it goes, even for big authors), because everyone's broke and busy. It's not personal.
- Pitch guest post ideas to other publications based on the topics you've covered in your book. Note: most publications won't get back to you (that's also how it goes, even for big authors).
- Write blog posts for your own website on the topics in your book or post full chapters, noting that the rest is coming in a full book.
- Test your book's purchase process by buying it. Amazon Kindle takes 12 hours and Createspace takes 3-5 days. Other sales platforms can be instant.

Launch day:

- Tell your mailing list where it's available. Just don't do a massive sales pitch; they're already on your list because they want your damn book.
- Offer your mailing list a deal to build traction and/or reward them for signing up with bonus content. Give them something in return for allowing you to show up in their inbox, hawking your book.
- Try not to lose your shit refreshing your sales reports and stats.
- Try not to go overboard on social media promotion. Sure, you're excited about your book (as you fucking should be) but everyone else may not share your enthusiasm... yet.

Note: there are lots of slimy services that offer to promote your book for a price. Most of them are rubbish and scammers. Unless you have a first-hand referral from someone you know or trust, assume any promotion services are only after your money, preying on the fact that you want to sell lots of books. If you have a publicity budget, spend it on an editor instead.

ACTION

Breathe deeply.

Drink heavily if necessary (it's allowed, because you're a writer now!).

Remember, most book sales start out lukewarm and will increase to a boil over time.

lesson thirteen

Promotion



It's easy to seem like an asshat, especially on social media, if all you do is shout about selling your book.

It's like being at a party and screaming every 30 seconds, "HEY, EVERYONE! STOP WHAT YOU'RE DOING AND BUY MY DAMN BOOK." Neither works, unless maybe it's your book launch party (but even then...)

Remember, effective promotion and marketing is about adding value, not just telling people, "Buy my shit!"

Experiment with promotion in ways that resonate with you, and if something doesn't feel right, don't fucking do it. Try crazy or outrageous giveaways (like winning [an adopted llama](#), for example) or offering deep discounts because it's 3pm on a Thursday, if that's what gets you off.

If you're more of a writer than a salesperson, promote your book by writing more articles, guest posts or mailing list blasts on the topics you've covered in your book.

Become a fucking content machine, where the content subtly promotes your book and its topic *for* you. The author bio on each guest post that links to your book is promotional GOLD.

Remember, it's not about you selling something at someone else, it's about how you can add value to someone's life. As with lesson #2, there are no rules. Do what works for you, based on your motivations and values, to get the word out.

ACTION

Before you do anything promote-y or sales-y, ask yourself, “Will doing this provide value to the people who will see it? Does what I’m doing align with my original motivations?”

Proceed only if it’s a resounding YES on both counts.

Additional resources



These books gave me ideas for audience building, non-asshatty-marketing, and how to write better. Every single one of these books was written by someone much smarter than I am.

Books & Articles

[APE](#), Guy Kawasaki & Shawn Welch

[Write. Publish. Repeat.](#), Sean Platt & Johnny B. Truant

[The War of Art](#), Steven Pressfield

[On Writing](#), Stephen King

[Your First 1000 Copies](#), Tim Grah

[The Icarus Deception](#), Seth Godin

[Steal Like an Artist](#), Austin Kleon

[Choose Yourself](#), James Altucher

[Anything You Want](#), Derek Sivers

[Authority](#), Nathan Barry

[Advice for Authors](#), Seth Godin (*this is an article*)

[How to Publish an Indie Book](#), Asymmetrical Press (*this is an article*)

[Self-Publish a Bestseller](#), James Altucher (*also an article*)

This course doesn't cost anything, but it isn't free.

Required payment is that you actually write your damn book and release it. I'm holding you to this one. As you're writing it, take photos or post updates using the hashtag [#mydamnbook](#).

If this course helped you in any way, tell a friend or enemy (or frenemy!) about it. [Here's a link to the signup page](#).

ACTION

Read some or all of the books above.

If you want to be a better writer, you need to read better writers.

Who made
this?



Thanks for asking! I'm Paul Jarvis, web designer, bestselling author and gentleman of adventure.

I've independently published 3 books so far. My articles appear in *Fast Company*, *Huffington Post*, *Adobe's 99u*, *The Next Web*, *GOOD magazine*, *Fizzle*, *Elephant Journal* and many other kick-ass publications.

I've also been a web designer for 20 years. I've worked with Fortune 500 companies, best-selling authors and the world's biggest entrepreneurs. My clients include Yahoo, Mercedes-Benz, Microsoft, The Highline in New York City, Danielle LaPorte, Marie Forleo and Kris Carr.

I currently live in the woods on Vancouver Island with my wife Lisa and our two rats, Onha' and Awe:ri. I've also got more tattoos than you. [Hit me up on twitter.](#)

Books I've published:

- [*Everything I Know*](#)
- [*Be Awesome at Online Business*](#)
- [*Eat Awesome*](#)

Sure, I could automatically add you to my main mailing list because you signed up for this course. But that'd make me a massive jerk. Instead, if you liked what you read (and this is the second-to-last email you'll get from this course), [sign up here](#) to read my articles on a weekly basis.

epilogue

The gentle ass kick



If you're in the process of writing your damn book, this is great news! Keep going and don't read any further.

If not, this is the part where you may have forgotten that you were, in fact, writing a book.

Or maybe you got back into your old procrastinating ways, making excuses about why you're not writing. Or maybe you're once again caught up in your own thoughts and fears about writing, which are keeping you from actually writing.

Don't worry, it happens to the best of us. But now **you've got to fucking change something in order for anything to actually change.**

As creatives, we tend to beat ourselves up if we don't live up to our own expectations. Just like lesson #2 (the one about worrying), this takes you out of the headspace required to actually write. So let it go. Breathe. Move forward.

[Download the PDF](#) of all the lessons and start again.

And if you're truly stuck, get help—there are lots of online writing communities where folks are going through the same fucking things as you. Here's one on [Google+](#) and here's another by [Asymmetrical Press](#). If you have specific questions, you can tweet them to me or use the hashtag [#mydamnbook](#).